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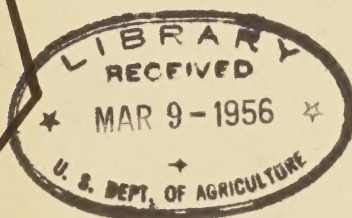
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**PUERTO RICAN
FARM WORKERS**

in Florida

HIGHLIGHTS OF A STUDY



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PUERTO RICAN FARM WORKERS

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in Florida

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Farm workers from Puerto Rico have established themselves as part of the seasonal farm labor force in the lower east coast area of Florida where a succession of vegetable crops provides continuous employment in agriculture for the months of December through March. Early in 1953, approximately 3,000 Puerto Ricans were reported working in the harvesting and processing of vegetable and sugar crops, representing one-fourth of the seasonal farm labor employed in the area. These farm workers are recent arrivals from rural sections of Puerto Rico. Most of them intend to remain on the mainland and continue to work in agriculture, migrating between Florida and the Middle Atlantic States. With agricultural skills acquired in Puerto Rico, they made a quick adjustment to mainland practices in spite of language problems. Employers find them industrious and resourceful and intend to use more Puerto Ricans to replace the diminishing supply of native farm workers.

Since 1947 the Employment Service has arranged for the annual migration of farm workers from Puerto Rico to the mainland for seasonal work in agriculture. More than 12,000 Puerto Ricans were placed on farms in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York and seven other northern States last year. However, in addition to this government-sponsored program, an undirected movement of workers for seasonal farm work in southern States has been growing in importance during the past several years.

To study the source of these workers, their characteristics, employment patterns, and adjustment into the continental agricultural economy, Puerto Rican workers in seven settlements in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties, Florida were interviewed in March 1953. These communities were Gould, Peters, Florida City, and Princeton in Dade County, Deerfield and Pompano in Broward County, and Delray Beach, Palm Beach County. The Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor provided Spanish language interviewers for this purpose. Of the 3,000 workers reported in the area, 1,000 lived in private or publicly-owned labor camps that were included in the survey. Approximately one worker in five living in these camps was

interviewed. A separate study was also made of 41 large growers who employ Puerto Rican as well as native Florida workers in order to learn about the growers' experience with Puerto Rican workers.

While Puerto Rico suffers from population pressure and lack of employment opportunities, the mainland has had a steadily diminishing farm labor supply since World War II. Acute shortages of workers for short periods of intensive work recur annually in some areas.

The most important industry in Puerto Rico is agriculture--sugar cane, pineapples, coffee, tobacco, and citrus fruits. Labor demand in these crops is seasonal with peak needs occurring between March and June. Even during periods of greatest labor demand, it is estimated that 40,000 Puerto Rican workers, with agricultural skills, could be referred to the mainland without jeopardizing the Island's harvest activity. During the off-season months in Puerto Rico, it is estimated that 100,000 workers are available for mainland jobs.

The study, therefore, served a dual purpose. The information found was designed to aid the Employment Service on the continent in planning ways of meeting farm labor needs by utilizing the reserve of workers in Puerto Rico, and to aid the Puerto Rican Employment Service in finding employment opportunities for thousands of surplus workers.

Characteristics of Workers

The 215 agricultural workers interviewed were men, mostly between the ages of 20 and 34 (table 1). For the most part, workers were single (table 2). Of those who were married, one-fourth had moved their families wholly or partly to the mainland for permanent settlement.

These workers had arrived in Florida by two routes. Some came to northern States on the mainland under contracts arranged by the Employment Service. After completing their work in northern States, they made their way to Florida for work in the vegetable harvest. The second stream came directly to Florida from Puerto Rico. Of the 215 workers interviewed, 40 percent came to the continent originally under government contracts. The remaining 60 percent came for the most part at their own expense, with no specific job offer, as a result of information received from relatives and friends who had preceded them.

The majority of the workers interviewed were recent arrivals on the mainland, 54 percent having arrived for the first

time within the 12-month period preceding the survey (table 6). Since the great majority of workers had family attachments in Puerto Rico, it was characteristic of the workers to make frequent trips home. For example, 9 of 34 workers who moved to the continent in 1951 had made 2 trips home since then, and 13 had returned once.

The survey covered only workers who were employed in agriculture in March 1953. It is likely that the majority of workers who came in previous years for farm work eventually found jobs in cities and are not included in this survey.

Employment Experience

At the time of the survey in March 1953, all of the workers were employed in the vegetable harvest. While on the continent in the last 12 months, most of them had worked exclusively at farm jobs. The "average" worker had spent 29.2 weeks on the continent during the year ending March 1953. Of this time, 27.0 weeks were spent in farm work, and 1.9 weeks in nonfarm work. According to worker responses, less than 1 week of the 29 was lost because of inclement weather, crop conditions, or illness, on the average. The respondents fell into two main groups--those who had arrived on the continent during or shortly before the spring harvest, and those who had been on the continent long enough to have worked in other States. Unemployment was virtually nonexistent among the first group because they had not been on the mainland long enough to experience a seasonal lull. Among the latter group, unemployment was extremely low because it was their custom to return to Puerto Rico to visit families after the completion of the fall vegetable and fruit harvest in the northern States and before the beginning of the winter vegetable harvest in Florida (table 4).

At the time of the survey, workers in the vicinity of Florida City, Goulds, Peters, and Princeton were employed almost exclusively in the tomato harvest. At Florida City, they were getting 70 to 80 cents an hour for tomato picking. At Goulds the prevailing wage was 60 cents an hour. Workers interviewed at Peters reported 10 cents a basket as the usual wage for tomato picking while in Princeton, wages were running 60 cents an hour or 10 cents a basket. At these rates workers could earn between \$6.00 and \$8.00 for a 10-hour day. Two of the workers who fell in the sample were foremen who were paid \$40.00 a week (table 5). In Deerfield, Delray Beach, and Pompano, most Puerto Ricans worked in the harvest of peppers, eggplant, squash, and cucumbers at a wage of \$5.50 to \$6.00 a day.

During the 12 months preceding the survey many of the workers had had experience working in other States (table 7). Most of the workers interviewed in this study were in Puerto Rico in the months of April and May. In June, they migrated to New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and these States remained the most important center of employment for those on the continent through October. Other States to which these workers migrated during the year included Connecticut, Massachusetts, Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, South Carolina, Mississippi, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Indiana.

About two-thirds of the workers interviewed in Dade County had been in the migratory stream along the Eastern Seaboard during the preceding year. Typically, these workers arrived on the continent some time during the spring or summer, were employed in the harvesting of asparagus, broccoli, spinach, and tomatoes in New Jersey or Pennsylvania. In the fall, they were employed harvesting apples and peaches. There was a seasonal lull in farm work during the late fall and early winter during which time some workers took the opportunity to return to Puerto Rico, resuming farm work at the tip of Florida in February and March 1953. There were cases of workers who filled in part of their year with factory work, principally in food processing plants in Pennsylvania and New York.

At Pompano, Delray Beach, and Deerfield, 32 of the 99 workers interviewed were recent arrivals; the remaining two-thirds having worked more or less continuously in various places during the preceding 12-month period. Typically, they picked beans and tomatoes in New York during the late spring and summer of 1952. Others worked in New Jersey cutting asparagus, picking beans, tomatoes, and peppers. Some were employed in the apple and peach harvest in Pennsylvania while a few reported occasional nonfarm jobs in food processing plants. About half visited Puerto Rico during seasonal lulls in the late fall and early winter, returning to the mainland for the vegetable harvest in Florida.

Very few of the workers included in the survey reported working experience in southern States other than Florida during the survey year. Six workers reported having worked in broccoli, asparagus, spinach, tomatoes, corn, potatoes, and strawberries in Virginia; and two others had done some nonfarm work in Virginia. Four workers reported an average of 6 weeks harvesting spinach, broccoli, beans, and corn in Maryland. One worker picked peaches for 9 weeks in South Carolina and 1 worker reported 28 weeks of work in Mississippi.

Employer Experience

For several years farmers in Florida have employed workers from Puerto Rico. A survey of 41 of these farmers revealed that the farm workers from Puerto Rico are highly regarded, both with respect to quantity and quality of work. Nearly all of the farmers expected to hire as many or more Puerto Rican workers in the future as they have in the past.

The 41 employers interviewed operated in Dade and Broward Counties, in the southeastern section of Florida. Of the 18 in Dade County, one-half employed Puerto Ricans only in tomato fields and the other half employed them in other crops as well. Twenty-one of the 23 employers interviewed in Broward County employed Puerto Ricans on multi-crop ~~truck~~ farms. Two employers used workers from the Island only in citrus fruit orchards.

The number of Puerto Ricans employed by individual growers varied from 10 to 200, and usually were about one-fourth to one-third of the total number of farm workers. Other workers were mainly Florida natives. In Broward County, most growers interviewed employed Puerto Ricans on their farms on a succession of vegetable crops for 6 or 7 months. Growers used Puerto Rican workers on a variety of crops, and found them satisfactory for all activities, many of which were new to the workers. Thirty-eight of the 41 farmers found them as capable as domestic farm workers, both in regard to quality and quantity of work, and 35 of the growers interviewed plan to use as many or more Puerto Rican workers next year in the vegetable harvest as this year. Of those who prefer domestic workers, one grower said that Puerto Ricans are not physically strong enough for some types of farm work. Three farmers stated that they tend to leave without notice before the harvest is completed. Most growers praised Puerto Rican workers highly, however, and the following comments are typical:

"Puerto Ricans are a godsend to the farmer of Florida. Puerto Ricans want to work and get ahead and save money and send it home."

"Quicker thinkers, faster workers, more eager to work."

"Good workers, ambitious, thrifty, dependable."

"Like to work - make money to send home. Follow instructions; don't have to stand over them to get them to work."

"Steady with work. Good workers after they learn what you want. Show interest in their work."

Table 1. Puerto Rican farm workers interviewed in Florida by age, March 1953

Age	Number of workers	Percent
Total	215	100.0
19 and under	17	7.9
20 - 24	81	37.6
25 - 29	38	17.7
30 - 34	26	12.1
35 - 39	17	7.9
40 and over	35	16.3
Not reported	1	0.5

Table 2. Puerto Rican farm workers interviewed in Florida by marital status, March 1953

Family status and location of family	Number of workers	Percent
Total	215	100.0
<u>Married</u>	93	43.3
Family on continent	10	4.7
Family not on continent	69	32.1
Family partly on continent	13	6.0
Location of family not reported	1	0.5
<u>Single</u>	119	55.3
<u>Other</u>	3	1.4

Table 3. Puerto Rican farm workers interviewed in Florida by source of mainland job offer

Source of job offer	: First entry :		Last entry	
	: No. workers		: with more	
	Number	Per-	than one	Per-
Source of job offer	workers	cent	entry	cent
Total	215	100.0	101	100.0
P. K. Dept. of Labor contract	87	40.5	5	4.9
Other job offer	12	5.5	10	10.0
Farmer	5	2.3	3	3.0
Travel bureau	2	0.9	4	4.0
Other and not specified	5	2.3	3	3.0
No job offer	116	54.0	86	85.1

Table 4. Labor force status of Puerto Rican farm workers interviewed in Florida, April 1952 to March 1953

Labor force status	Average number of man-weeks
Total man-weeks	48.0 <u>1/</u>
Not on mainland	18.8
On mainland	29.2
Employed	28.9
Farm work	27.0
Nonfarm work	1.9
Not employed	0.2
Weather and crops	0.1
Illness	0.1

1/ The study was based on twelve 4-week months resulting in a 48-week year.

Table 5. Wage rates of Puerto Rican farm workers in most recent employment, Dade and Broward counties, Florida, March 1953

Wage rate	Number of workers
Total	215
<u>Hourly rate</u>	
50 cents	2
55 cents	3
60 cents	65
65 cents	1
70 cents	5
75 cents	1
80 cents	14
<u>Daily rate</u>	
\$5.00	8
5.50	30
6.00	53
6.50	1
8.00	5
<u>Piece rate (tomatoes)</u>	
10 cents basket	23
<u>Weekly rate</u>	
\$40.00	2
<u>Other and not specified</u>	2

Table 6. Puerto Rican farm workers interviewed in Florida, by time of first arrival on mainland and number of returns to mainland for work

Year and month of first arrival	Number of workers	Remained on mainland	No. of additional trips to mainland for work			
			1	2	3	4 or more
Total	215	114	62	23	9	7
1947 and prior years	6	1	1	-	1	3
1948	14	2	2	3	4	3
1949	13	2	4	4	2	1
1950	23	7	7	7	2	-
1951	34	12	13	9	-	-
1952	87	52	35	-	-	-
1952 January	3	-	3	-	-	-
February	2	2	-	-	-	-
March	2	1	1	-	-	-
April	15	5	10	-	-	-
May	4	1	3	-	-	-
June	9	4	5	-	-	-
July	9	8	3	-	-	-
August	11	3	8	-	-	-
September	3	2	1	-	-	-
October	3	4	1	-	-	-
November	10	10	-	-	-	-
December	14	14	-	-	-	-
1953 January	15	15	-	-	-	-
February	13	13	-	-	-	-
March	10	10	-	-	-	-

Table 7. Puerto Rican farm workers interviewed in Florida, by location and by month during the year ending March 1953.

Year and Month	Average man-months on continent						
	Average						
	man-months						
	in						
	Puerto Rico	Florida	Jersey	York	Pennsylvania	All Others	
Distribution of time in average month	83	71	32	11	8	9	
1952 April	126	31	36	9	7	6	
May	117	19	47	12	9	11	
June	108	9	60	17	9	12	
July	96	8	68	21	10	12	
August	88	7	46	23	15	16	
September	86	7	63	18	21	20	
October	98	29	42	18	14	14	
November	104	75	16	5	6	9	
December	84	119	4	1	4	3	
1953 January	57	155	-	1	1	1	
February	26	187	-	1	-	1	
March	5	210	-	-	-	-	

